

Nevada Office of Veterans Services

Nevada State Veterans Home
100 Veterans Memorial Drive
Boulder City, NV 89005

Veterans fought for our quality of life for which we are most grateful...now it's our turn to fight for theirs.

May 23, 2005 Agency Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present: Gary Bermeosolo, Administrator of the Veterans Home
Darnell Bennett
Karen Dodd, Personnel
Chuck Fulkerson, Director
Darrel Hansen, ASO, Veterans Home
Steve Long, Deputy Director
Ace Tan, ASO

I. Old Business

A. Budget Update

1. Chuck Fulkerson advised that the bill for the new positions passed: the Women Veterans Coordinator, 2 Veteran Service Officers, 2 groundkeepers and 2 Administrative Assistants.
2. He also advised there are more money bills pending: one for the sunscreen for the buses and one for paving the road to the Fernley Cemetery. The Ways and Means Committee will hear the sunscreen bill, tomorrow, 24 May. Chuck will get ahold of Bob Guernsey to bring up Bill 211.
3. Chuck also advised that Senator Titus was on the Combined Committee at the last budget hearing and had the Womens Veterans Coordinator position rolled into the next budget as the hearing was closing up so that hearing was not heard.
4. Chuck advised other housekeeping bills passed and that the non-exempt money bills had to be out of the Second House by last Friday. He also advised it was unknown how many bills had died.

B. Questions about the Legislature

1. Karen Dodd asked what happened to the classified positions within the state that were slated to go unclassified. It is unknown if State Personnel did anything further with that. Karen will check on it.
 - a. Gary advised he has three positions at the Veterans Home he believes should be exempt positions: the Administrator, the Assistant Administrator and the Director of Nursing Services, due to the overtime hours. Karen advised the Administrator and the Assistant Administrator may not be a problem to change to unclassified but the Director of Nursing Services may be a problem due to other DNS positions throughout the state being

classified. Chuck requests we check original documents to ascertain original classifications and submit requests to change them. Chuck requests a report on the original documents at the next meeting.

II. Unfinished Business from 15 November 2004

A. Pay Increases for VSO

1. Chuck asked if the increases are worked through the normal personnel process. Karen advised that it is and that with reference to the supervisor position, per State Personnel, she and Steve Long need to assign the duties to an individual, a senior Service Officer, and then do an NPD-19 and State Personnel would then come out to do a desk audit and review the position. That is the only way to obtain a supervisor position. Chuck asked if they need to choose a position already on the staff and already in a position and Karen advised yes. Chuck asked Steve if he has a recommendation. Steve advised he has a plan in mind which involves appointing a current Veterans Service Officer into the Womens Veterans Coordinator position then appointing a Senior VSO into the Supervisory position leaving a VSO position to fill. Ace further advised the WVC position will be a grade drop of 31 from the VSO position, which is a grade 32. Steve advised he thought the WVC would be on parity with the Deputy Director, as are other state's coordinators. Ace advised this is not how this position was submitted or approved. Chuck requested to know if this can be changed. He requested that Steve give Karen information on what other states have their coordinators at the Deputy Director level and for Karen to check into changing the pay grade from 31 to 33.

B. Womens Veterans Coordinator

1. Base Location

- a. It is decided that the base location will be in Las Vegas per the following discussion.
- b. Ace believes the location should be in Las Vegas for two reasons: one is Las Vegas is the population center of Nevada and two its political consideration. Senator Titus worked hard to get us this position and will possibly be of further help with the coordinator close by. Karen Dodd agrees with Ace. Steve believes that the most qualified person is in Reno but agrees that Las Vegas is the best location for the job. Gary also agrees Las Vegas is the best location but that the position will be open to both inside the agency and outside the agency so anyone can apply. It is also mentioned that the position will involve a lot of traveling and some of that will be cut down by being based in Las Vegas.

2. Pay Grade

- a. Per the earlier discussion concerning the pay increase for Veterans Service Officers, it is decided that the Womens Veterans Coordinator should be at a Deputy Director level.
- b. Gary advised that in an earlier audit of a Veterans Service Officer Supervisory position it was easier to take the existing VSO

and make them an acting Supervisor, rewrite the performance standards, do an NPD-19 and then have personnel do a desk audit, as opposed to filling the position then trying to upgrade the pay level. This may work in the WVC position as well. Steve advised he had an outline of the duties and responsibilities of the WVC and Chuck advised he had a file compiled for the WVC which may help in rewriting the performance standards of the position. It is also mentioned that the position will be a classified one. Karen asked if the position should be a VSO level instead of program officer. It is decided to keep it at the level of a program officer as they have more latitude and a broader reach which is needed for outreach duties.

3. Other Duties of the WVC

a. Outreach will be a primary part of the job. The WVC will be the full time outreach contact for the 37 different Native American communities throughout the state as well as becoming the director of resources available, the director of memorials and director of state benefits. Outreach also includes putting together a quarterly agency newsletter, locating veterans, talking to veterans organizations and becoming an advocate for women veterans, particularly in the health field. The position will require both the understanding of the candidate that it does not only deal with women veterans and the agency's realization that the position will not handle all of the outreach programs. Steve suggests that possibly having an Administrative Assistant handle some of these duties under the WVC's supervision may alleviate some of the problems.

C. PO or ASO for Cemetery Superintendents

1. Jack Porrino, Superintendent for the SNVMC is a program officer 3, grade 35 and Wes Block, Superintendent for the NNVMC is a program officer 2, grade 33.
2. Jack's main priority is to realign his staff and create two new positions at the Boulder City Cemetery. One of the positions would be a facility supervisor, moving the current supervisor into this position. The other position would be a maintenance control worker, taking one of the ground equipment operators and make him a mechanic. That leaves a slot open vacated by the supervisor which will be filled by the irrigation specialist.
3. As with the earlier VSO supervisory position, these new positions cannot be requested with the new budget but may be approved by having the existing person fill the position and complete an NPD-19 to reclassify the positions. Per Chuck, he requested Steve and Karen get a proposal together for the next meeting on how to create the new positions without losing the current positions.

D. Grade/Step Increase for VSO

1. All VSO's will now be grade 32. Steve advised he had some VSO's at grade 27 before.
2. Steve advised he would like to eventually see Senior VSOs be promoted into a VSO II position. It is decided that will be discussed further at a later date.

E. Pay Increase for RN's

1. The 10% increase went into effect for the RNs and permission was granted to bring in advance steps for the LPN.

F. Flex Time Policy.

1. Karen advised that the policy was killed and is a done deal.

G. Veterans Homes Issues

1. Deputy Administrator Position

- a. Steve advised there will be a person out to look at the position. Darrel's NPD-19 needs to be updated because some of the assistant administrator's duties are duplicated with the ASO's. Steve has asked Darrel and Darnell to sort out their duties and make a new duty list which will be submitted at the end of the week.

2. Training position for a Safety Officer

- a. Karen advised that per State Personnel they feel that since other agencies have a security officer classification the security officer is the training position. Nothing will be changing with this and no new positions will be allowed.

3. Veterans Administration Survey

- a. Steve advised that it went very well. The accident review has significantly improved over the last year. Four provisional suggestions were recommended which all had to do with positions of updating and signing orders. Steve advised this has been difficult due to the resignation of the medical director but has submitted a plan of correction and is awaiting feedback to see if it was accepted. He also advised due to the resignation of the current director they are looking into temporarily hiring the previous medical director so she may train the replacement.

H. Cemetery Report System for Grave Markers

1. Chuck asked Steve the progress on the report system. Steve advised he created a form which he believed Chuck had seen. No further work has been done since then and he will revisit the issue.

I. New VSO software

1. Steve advised the VSOs were going to change their vetrec software sometime in the future to be more compatible with other states but he has not heard anything recently. Chucks asked him to have Jo check with other VSOs who will be in Corpus Christie, TX for the annual conference about this new software. Ace advised he just paid for four years of the current vetrec software but Steve suggested it will take awhile to implement the change and we can double up for awhile during the transition.

III. New Business

A. Collection Service

1. Currently we use the Comptroller's office which is free. Chuck asked why is this an issue? Also, the only place that would need it is the Veterans Home. Per Gary he believes it is a weak system. Their collection process is not aggressive. Gary worked with the Department of Attorney General's (DAG) office to develop a system which has been proven to be successful. They put together a collection protocol which involves the DAG office, which is available for review. The auditors approve of it. The system involves letters going out to the veterans in different time frames and at different levels and of being turned over to the Attorney General's Office for collection, who then sends them a letter stating this is a due debt that needs to be paid or they will be taken to litigation which they must pay for. Gary advised he would like to prevent using collection agencies due to the ill will it creates. Gary does have two people he would like to turn over to the collection agency, however, both due to veterans who received lump sum payments and did not pay their debts. It is decided to use the collection agency for that purpose only as most veterans who are unable to pay are on Medicaid and have no assets or resources to pay. Darnell agrees with Gary on this issue and is making a list of people to write off instead of sending to the collection agency.

2. Clark County has a contract almost ready that is a stop-gap measure to pick up members with too much money to pay for Medicaid but don't have enough to pay the Veterans Home. Stringent criteria is attached to the use of Clark County's social services for those individuals who will fall in that gap. For instance, if someone needs emergency care the law states the home must take them to the nearest emergency room. Clark County says they must take them to UMC because that is where they have their contract. One of the problems of the contract is who is liable if that person dies enroute? Another problem is mental health. Any mental health service utilized must be through a county-contracted mental health person per Clark County's social service rules. If they are not on the Veterans Home contract where do they send them? These are problems that can be overcome but they still need a little more work. Once the Home gets this contract there will be very few people who the Home will need to utilize the collection service for. Darrel advised he believes this summarized the situation.

B. Insurance for Committee Members and Risk Management for Volunteers

1. Gary advised that he attended an inval meeting where our volunteer coordinator indicated that anyone who volunteers on a routine basis needs to go through a volunteer process of getting a criminal history background check, the PPD, orientation, etc. The chairman did not like that idea and felt it would cause us to lose volunteer veterans. Gary advised he tries to make it as easy as possible for volunteers. The meeting members drafted a letter for Chuck to take to the Veterans Affairs Commission. This letter defined "volunteer" as follows: "someone who volunteers on a routine basis and is under the supervision of a person who works for the home". It also defines "occasional visitors" as follows: "people who volunteer on a non-routine basis and are usually

associated with a veterans organization". Gary observed this is a very fine line and asks how rigid does the agency want to be in defining these terms. Per risk management, they have no definition of a volunteer other than for workman's comp purposes, making this a workman's comp issue. It was undecided how the agency wants to handle this.

C. Helping Citizens with publicity

1. Chuck brought up the topic of assisting citizens with publicity for personal endeavors. This is as a result of learning of a woman who wrote a book about losing her father in Vietnam and wanted the Nevada Office of Veterans Services to help her with the publicity for the book. It is decided that the agency will not assist private citizens for their personal gain. We can, however, direct them to any links that might be helpful on our website.

D. Office Requirements

1. Reference office space for Las Vegas, Steve spoke with John Brighton and expressed the need for more work space and will be writing a letter to state those needs exactly. He also toured office space at 940 W Owens, which is adjacent to their current offices. It is currently VA leased but it has 2 large rooms that can easily accommodate the entire Las Vegas staff of 5 VSOs and a reception area that will accommodate the two administrative assistants. It is unknown if the VA will want to utilize this space in the future. In Steve's letter he will also request this office space.
2. In reference to the new hospital being built, Steve does not believe they will give our agency enough office space as needed. This location is 15 miles from the hospital but is still centralized and the best location. Since the primary care units will be close to the hospital it would okay to have their offices at the hospital, too, but that is three years down the road.
3. Reference office space for Boulder City, Gary advised some of their issues would be resolved if they get the new dining room built. The mini-dining room could then be converted into a conference room. They are looking into a temporary, mobile classroom set up. Public works gave the go-ahead to do this and they are looking into figures for this temporary solution. If the funding is not approved for the new dining room the agency will have to look into temporary, mobile-home type classrooms as a permanent solution. Further issues involving the business office is that it was not built to accommodate privacy act considerations and this poses a problem for several of the employees. Gary requested permission to have Public Works come in to do a space study. One of Gary's ideas is to have portable partitions set up against the wall, providing this is up to code with fire safety, air conditioning and electrical considerations, etc. Chuck agreed Public Works needs to inspect the space.

E. Cemetery Monies

1. Chuck advised he is looking into obtaining more money for the cemeteries. He advised that during peacetime the federal government doesn't pay for burials. At the current time, our policy is to absorb the added cost.

2. Another issue is that we currently charge \$350 for burial of a spouse, which was set in 1990, at the time of the cemetery's inception. There are two different bills in Congress now to raise the cost anywhere from \$870 up to as much as \$1,200. Chuck is thinking of raising the fees for peacetime veterans and for spouses. However, per the VA, of the 27 million veterans, less than 3% are peacetime, so raising the fees may not help. Per Ace, the main issue is the fee for spousal burials. The fee to bury a veteran has gone up, with another possible fee increase in site, while the fee for spousal burial has remained the same. One possible solution is to charge different rates for different types of burials. Ace also advised that keeping rates the same for a lengthy period takes the agency out of the running when using the federal VA's fee adjustment rates. The reasoning would be justifying an increase when we haven't increased rates along with the federal VA in the past so why are we increasing the rates now? Per Ace, the spousal burials make up approximately 1/4 of the burials and the private sector charges \$1,500 on an average. Gary suggested adopting a policy that states the burial fee of spouses be \$250 above what the federal VA reimburses which allows the policy to be mobile with its rates and can adjust accordingly with the federal VA's rates. Chuck also added that the policy may include amendments that the fees are not to exceed the average private sector prices. Chuck pointed out that the National Cemetery Administrative Conference is in June and requested attending members ask other agencies what they are charging and how they are handling their policies. He also requested a report on this at the next meeting.

F. New Positions

1. Chuck advised with reference to the seven new positions that were approved, he wants them recruited and hired and ready to begin work on 1 October 2005. Steve asked if the agency was to buy the equipment for these positions beforehand or wait until they are actually at work? Ace stated that yes, we can buy the equipment beforehand as the money is already in the budget.
2. Also, with reference to this year's budget, money is there for new furniture. The Reno office will be purchasing from the prison industries and Ace advised their prices are very comparable. Steve advised they are looking into the prison industries as well but are comparing prices with several different places as the Las Vegas office may want more flexibility and may decide to purchase the modular office set up.

G. Certified Public Manager Program

1. Per Karen, City Personnel has a new program that is a nationally recognized program for accredited leadership development for public managers and supervisors. State Personnel has money to send two people from each state agency, which is normally \$1,800 per person. They need a list of names by the end of the month. One requirement is the person must be grade 35 and above to qualify and State Personnel is sending information letters to everyone who qualifies. Ace advised he was set to go last year but was unable to due to budget timing and he is set to go this year on a rain-check basis under last year's funds. A discussion followed on which two members the agency should send

under the State's funds. Ace suggested based on the curriculum he received last year he believes it would most benefit Jeff (Fuhler) and Jo (Cantrell) but not ASOs. He also stated he believes it will be an ongoing offer so additional people may attend in the future. He does note, however, that it is a huge commitment since it is a 17-month program and candidates are required to be gone from their jobs a lot. Gary advised he thinks Darrel and Paul Ripple would benefit as possible replacements for Darnell and himself. Karen restated that the names must be submitted by the end of the month and suggested she receive the names of interested members by the end of today. The person applying needs to submit the application, with their supervisors approval, by 31 May.

H. Line Diagram of the Agency

1. Chuck asked who put together the line diagram and suggested putting the cemetery committee members and the commission members off to the side with a line indicating they are advisory or including a section that states advisory with a dotted line indicating the members.

I. Administrative Assistant Interviews

1. Gary advised they are doing interviews this Thursday and Friday. They will have the candidates write a letter in response to a genuine complaint letter, with the actual names deleted, for Gary's signature, which will gauge their political and legal sensitivity. They are also having the candidates draft a press release within 30 minutes; they will then sit down for an interview. Gary will provide a copy of the job description as a guide for the Reno office to use in hiring their AA position. The description is for a trainee position but with the idea of an AA IV in mind, which is actually an executive assistant. Chuck asked how to fill these vacancies and Karen advised she would start the recruiting process and open a list. Gary suggests making sure there isn't already a list in existence and if there isn't get one opened up and announced.

J. Bus Repair

1. Gary mentioned that the buses for the Veterans Home are leaking due to the caulking drying out and they need to be repaired.

K. Next Meeting

1. It is decided that the next meeting will be Monday, September 12, 2005.

L. Adjournment

1. With no further business, the meeting is adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by: _____

